

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 2814

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MARR PBOR PDIP LE UN FR
SUBJ: FRENCH REASSESSMENT OF COMMITMENT TO UNIFIL

1. SINCE FRENCH UNIFIL CONTINGENT BEGAN TAKING CASUALTIES, NOTABLY ITS COMMANDER COLONEL SALVAN, QUESTION OF CONTINUED FRENCH COMMITMENT TO UNIFIL HAS BEEN THROWN INTO HIGH RELIEF. SEVERAL OBSERVERS HAVE TOLD US THAT FRENCH GENERAL CUQ, DEPUTY TO UNIFIL COMMANDER GENERAL ERSKINE, IS RESPONDING MORE TO INSTRUCTIONS FROM PARIS THAN FROM ERSKINE. ON THE GROUND IN THE SOUTH, ROLE OF FRENCH CONTINGENT SEEMS TO HAVE SHIFTED FROM ONE OF CONSIDERABLE AGGRESSIVENESS TO ONE OF CONSIDERABLE CAUTION.

2. BEIRUT PRESS MAY 19 REPORTS ARRIVAL OF HENRI SERVAN, "CHEF DU SERVICE DU LEVANT" AT FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTRY. ON MAY 18 HE PAID CALLS ON CAMILLE CHAMOUN, PIERRE GEMAYEL, SAEB SALAM AND SOME OTHER DEPUTIES, ACCOMPANIED BY FRENCH AMBASSADOR ARGOD. LATTER REPORTEDLY TOLD SALAM THERE WAS NO TRUTH TO REPORTS THAT FRENCH MIGHT WITHDRAW FROM UNIFIL. CHAMOUN, ACCORDING TO IKE, SAID SERVAN "INDICATED THAT THE FRENCH WANT TO DO EVERYTHING IN THEIR POWER TO
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PURGE SOUTH LEBANON."

3. IN COMMENT TO PRESS HIMSELF, SERVAN PUT IT SOMEWHAT DIFFERENTLY. ACCORDING TO L'ORIENT-LE JOUR, HE SAID: "WE HOPE THESE DIFFICULTIES WILL PROGRESSIVELY DISAPPEAR, WHICH WILL PERMIT THE UN FORCE TO FULFIL ITS MANDATE, WHICH CONSISTS IN OVERSEEING THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE ISRAELI

FORCES, THE REESTABLISHMENT OF PEACE AND SECURITY IN THIS ZONE OF SOUTH LEBANON AND TO FACILITATE THE RESTORATION OF THE AUTHORITY OF THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT."

4. ONE INFORMED LEBANESE POLITICAL OBSERVER, PHALANGE POLITICAL BUREAU MEMBER KARIM PAKRADOUNI, TOLD EMBOFF MAY 18 THAT HIS FEELING WAS THAT FRENCH HAD PRETTY MUCH DECIDED TO PULL OUT OF UNIFIL ALTOGETHER. PAKRADOUNI THOUGHT THAT SCENARIO WOULD BE THAT IN ABOUT TWO WEEKS FRENCH WILL ANNOUNCE THEIR WITHDRAWAL, EXPLAINING THAT IT WAS BECAUSE ISRAEL HAD NOT COMPLETED ITS PART OF THE BARGAIN BY WITHDRAWING COMPLETELY FROM ALL OF SOUTH LEBANON. IN PAKRADOUNI'S VIEW, POLITICAL PRESSURE IN FRANCE CRITICAL OF THE UNIFIL OPERATION WAS RAPIDLY BECOMING INTOLERABLE.

5. FRENCH MILITARY ATTACHE TOLD DATT MAY 18 HE DOES NOT EXPECT UNIFIL TO BE RENEWED AFTER SIX-MONTH MANDATE AND CONVEYED IMPRESSION FRENCH MIGHT NOT MAINTAIN THEIR OWN UNIFIL COMMITMENT, WHILE STRESSING DIFFICULTIES UNIFIL WAS FACING.

6. WE WOULD APPRECIATE EMBASSY PARIS' VIEW OF UPSHOT OF SERVAN VISIT AND LIKELIHOOD OF FRENCH WITHDRAWAL, ASSUMING THAT THERE IS NO MAJOR (AND UNLIKELY) BREAK IN THE SITUATION, SUCH AS COMPLETE CONFIDENTIAL

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ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL OR A SUCCESSFUL MODUS VIVENDI BETWEEN THE UN AND THE PALESTINIANS.
LANE

NOTE BY OC/TC MESSAGE DELAYED IN TRANSMISSION.

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